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a special study of

KENYATTA'S KENYA

by

John Chamberlain



prepared for the

AMERICAN-AFRICAN AFFAIRS ASSOCIATION

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Kenya

INTRODUCTION

The American-African Affairs Association commissioned the distinguished columnist, Mr. John Chamberlain, to prepare for the Association an on-the-spot report concerning Kenya and neighboring areas. Like the good reporter he is, Mr. Chamberlain covered the territory thoroughly, interviewed officials and common people intensively, and (perhaps most important of all) preserved throughout a sense of proportion about what a stranger can be expected to learn in a comparatively brief period of time.

Mr. Chamberlain's report, which is published herewith under the title "Kenyatta's Kenya", is an impressive addition to the body of information concerning Africa which it has been the privilege of the Association to place before the American people. Speaking personally, I am especially gratified that Mr. Chamberlain was able to find so much that is hopeful in the prospects of this fascinating country—especially at a time when so many other hopes for stable and prosperous post-colonial regimes in Africa are being summarily dashed. His qualified optimism merely confirms what many have believed from the beginning; namely, that no one social, political or economic solution can possibly be adequate for all of Africa, but that the paths toward a happy future will be as varied as the many faces of the vast continent itself.

William A. Rusher
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KENYATTA'S KENYA

By John Chamberlain

The first impressions are strong. The land of Kenya, the highland part of it no less than the coast, is obviously African. But, to an American who spent part of his youth in the West of his own country, it is disturbingly, almost enchantingly, familiar. Coming into Nairobi airport from the North, and looking out and down from the plane, one might be flying over Wyoming at one moment, or over Arizona the next. Mount Kenya and the Aberdare chain might be western mountains. Nairobi itself is like a California town in the sunshine – and one recalls that Anne Lindbergh said it was "like Pasadena." The illusion is sustained by the gardened appearance of the place, which goes back, one is told, to the work of Peter Greensmith, who, as Director of Parks, has been a wizard with the omnipresent bougainvillea. Before Greensmith, Nairobi was a different sort of western town – the old pictures suggest Cactus Gulch and the Red Ike Saloon of Deadeye Dick; and the old diary of Colonel Meinertzhagen (from which practically every writer on Kenya quotes, partly because he prophesied the Mau Mau rebellion back in 1904) tells of a village of tents, tin roofs and shanty structures that might have come out of Gary Cooper's Hollywood.

The western illusion is sustained by the climate – only in this instance one thinks of the Mexican plateau. Nairobi, just under the Equator, is 5,800 feet up; though the sun shines hot and direct, the air is cool, and the tse tse fly and the mosquito are far away. This is not malarial or sleeping sickness country. From the city's many suburbs there is the hint of mountains in the distance (though I never did see Mount Kenya's 17,000-foot snow-crested bulk from Nairobi itself).

If the American feels at home because of the western ground tone, however, he is made quickly aware that Kenya – and the very related country of Tanzania to the south – are something that you can see no place else on earth. Just twenty minutes outside Nairobi, in the Nairobi National Park (enclosed on three sides, but open to all Africa on the fourth), one thinks again of Wyoming or Nevada. What one supposes are the Ngong Hills (haunt of Baroness Blixen of "Out of Africa" fame) are blue on the horizon, and the perspectives are long. But then, looking to the middle distance, you see your first giraffe, cropping the flat top of an acacia. Though the land itself suggests Wyoming, the ostriches, the baboons, the zebras, the ugly warthogs, and the dainty black-striped Thomson's gazelle transport you to a different part of your childhood, when you were reading Theodore Roosevelt's "African Game Trails" and wondering whether you would ever see anything more exotic in its native habitat than a Yellowstone bear or bison.

Back in Nairobi, a few half-hours spent under the thorn tree at the sidewalk cafe in front of the New Stanley Hotel are enough to scatter the last illusions that Kenya is another American West. The Indians (and, one presumes, the Pakistanis), with their tired eyes, their turbans and their saris, seem almost as numerous as the blacks. Black cripples manipulate stump legs along the street, and a tall boy who says he is a Masai asks for money to get back to Tanzania. One is aware that censorship exists in Kenya (I was warned not to bring former U.S. Ambassador William Attwood's "The Reds and the Blacks" into the country), but the pro-Communist Oginga Odinga's literature proclaiming that it is "not yet uhuru" (or "not yet freedom") is spread out on the sidewalk for anyone to buy. The tourists, with their somewhat affected safari clothes, are West European (chiefly German) and American in about equal numbers. One quickly discovers that the Indians do most of the shop-keeping, and that whites with British accents still fill the executive and administrative jobs, though there are plenty of Africans working under Indian and British direction in stores, markets and banks. The scene is multi-racial (Nairobi is fifty per cent African, thirty-five per cent Indian and fifteen per cent European), but the first Englishman I talked with in casual conversation said that multi-racialism will be gone in a generation. Whether it will or not depends, of course, on policy – but the Indians have already been warned that they must become Kenya citizens to keep their businesses, and at Nairobi Airport I saw tearful farewell parties for Indians who were pulling up stakes and going to Britain

rather than lose the protection of the Empire that has given Kenya back to the African majority without any particular guarantees for minority peoples.

The introduction to Nairobi and its vicinity sounds several themes. One is that the land itself, in its highland setting (it's this that made the English call it "white man's country"), is energizing. There can be a first-rate modern nation here. Another theme is that of the linked destinies of the fantastic game animals and the camera-loaded tourists, which, if brains continue to exist in Kenya, must remain the East African equivalent of the Goose That Lays the Golden Eggs. As I have remarked elsewhere, "the lions are on our side." Still another theme is the difficulty of maintaining a multi-racial country when a majority is freed to write its own constitutional future with or without reference to minority rights. The theme of the Cold War is in Oginga Odinga's pamphlets on the Nairobi sidewalk; likewise in President Kenyatta's warnings to politicians to stop taking Communist money. And the mythology of "uhuru" is there in the names on the street signs, which honor Kenyatta (who deserves it for being the George Washington of his country) and Field Marshall Dedan Kimathi (the Mau Mau leader who, so one gathers, was more of a deranged Al Capone than a patriot worth reverencing). The fact that the mythology of uhuru exalts both saints and rascals means that the future itself must remain chancy, for its equivocal tradition can take Kenya almost anywhere. The one major theme that you don't hear sounded immediately on the sidewalk in Nairobi is that of tribalism (though a knowledge of Swahili or local tribal dialects might reveal it quickly enough). I wasn't put on to the omnipresence of tribalism until I moved out of Nairobi with a Kikuyu driver, who introduced it quite casually in the tone of his voice when he announced, proudly: "I am Kikuyu."

The resolution of the several themes hinges, so one is told, on Kenyatta's life expectancy. ("Give Kenyatta five years," so a USIS man says, "and this will be a nation.") When I landed in Nairobi Kenyatta was on a "working vacation" somewhere down on the Indian Ocean coast – and, since the "Mzee wa nguvu" (or the "wise old man with the beard") wasn't present with his reassuring cries of "Harambee" (or "Let's work together") and his omnipresent fly whisk, there were the usual rumors that his health was bad, or that he was drinking too much. But when I returned to Nairobi after a thousand-mile swing around Kenya and northern Tanzania in a tough little Ford Cortina with the Kikuyu Raphael Macharia, who must be the best driver since Eddie Rickenbacker, Kenyatta was back in his capital, entertaining his old comrade-in-arms, Dr. Hastings Banda of Malawi, at the annual Nairobi Agricultural Show. The "Mzee" was obviously in good shape, though he no longer looks like the lean warrior with the spear (he is a mixture of Kikuyu and Masai) who appears on the cover of his highly regarded book on the cultural anthropology of the Kikuyu tribe, "Facing Mt. Kenya." For a man who is presumably in his seventies (he doesn't know his actual age) Kenyatta is extraordinarily lively – and the informed guess is

that he will certainly have the needed five years to make Kenya a real nation.

The transformation of Kenyatta's reputation since the time when he was suspected of masterminding the Mau Mau rebellion, with its disgusting oath-taking and its terrifying atrocities, is the most remarkable phenomenon in present-day Africa. The man who changed his name from Johnstone Kamau to Jomo Kenyatta (the first name means "burning spear" and the second is taken from the ornamental beaded belt that he used to wear as a meter reader for a water company) was arrested in 1952 for refusing to denounce Mau Mau (he professed to be innocent of it). After the Kenyatta trial and conviction, Sir Patrick Renison, the Governor of Kenya, spoke of the incarcerated "Mzee" as "the African leader to darkness and death." It is inconceivable that a man of Kenyatta's canniness couldn't have known about Mau Mau, but there is the color of truth to the claim of his loyal supporters that if he had denounced the oathing and the rebellion itself he would surely have been murdered. The Mau Mau uprising was, first of all, a civil war within the million-and-a-quarter members of the Kikuyu tribe; in fourteen months of the Mau Mau Emergency period of 1952-53 more than six hundred Kikuyu were killed in an intra-tribal terror campaign for being "loyal" to Britain, whereas only sixteen European settlers met their deaths. As the symbol of Kenya's struggle for independence, Kenyatta would have been dropped in a minute by the majority of his fellow tribesmen if he had denounced Mau Mau.

Kenyatta is enigmatic, but he is also a pragmatist, along with Tom Mboya, Daniel Arap Moi and other Kenya national leaders. (Only Oginga Odinga, who has taken Communist money, sticks to a strictly orthodox socialist line in his fulminations against Chief Planner Mboya's "mixed economy" ideas.) The leaders insist that anybody is welcome to make money in Kenya provided he doesn't steal it and the "public sector" of the economy is not challenged. They also insist that the Cold War between East and West is not an important Kenya issue (one of the counts against former Ambassador Attwood's "The Reds and Blacks" is that the author is hipped on the danger of Communism, which is an odd complaint when one considers Attwood's generally anti-anti-Communist stance). Finally, Kenyatta and his Administration play down the possibility of a resurgent tribalism. If everything goes as Kenyatta wishes it to go, Kenya will become a prosperous semi-capitalist nation, with no penalties being visited upon whites, Indians or Pakistanis provided they become loyal Kenya citizens. Kenyatta, who always liked the "English in England" (he spent fifteen years in Britain and even took an Englishwoman to be one of his wives), obviously wants foreign capital, and where neighboring Tanzania welcomes the Red Chinese (even to the extent of hiring them to build a railroad from Dar es Salaam to the Zambia copper belt), Kenya has denounced Peking for trying to corrupt Kenyan school children by distributing its propaganda. But whether Kenya can make it as a racially harmonious and "mixed economy" nation after Kenyatta's departure

from the scene will depend, whether the Kenyans like it or not, on what happens in the rest of Africa and in the confrontation (which is by no means over) between the East and the West throughout the old colonial world.

The Cold War isn't quite so far away as the Kenya leaders would have you believe, as they discovered for themselves when some land mines dug up on the Northern Frontier border close to Somaliland disclosed Cairo markings, which presumably means that they came from Soviet Russia. In any case, the Soviets have armed the Somali shifta, or marauding tribesmen, who pay no attention to borders. At the recent Organization of African Unity conference at Kinshasa in the Congo, representatives of Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia talked about settling their border differences peacefully, but to tell a shifta to stay put is like telling a Tom cat to stay on one side of a backyard fence — and as long as Russian arms are to be had no talk will mean much. South of Kenya, in Tanzania, the Red Chinese continue to impress President Nyerere despite the backfiring of the cultural revolution on the China mainland. Nyerere, though British educated, remains an ideologue; he has announced that he intends to collectivize farming in Tanzania on the Israeli kibbutz style, and his trust in the Red Chinese to build him a railroad is sublimely innocent. "African socialism," as interpreted by Kenyatta and Mboya, seems much more fluid than the same socialism to the south of Mount Kilimanjaro. Nyerere wants tourism, but he has taken to warning the Masai tribesmen that they must discard their picturesque robes and stop showing their bare thighs to tourist photographers at a shilling a camera shot. The same socialist Puritanism keeps private lodge keepers near the Tanzania game parks from enlarging their facilities; they simply can't get permits from Nyerere's government to expand an essentially capitalist operation. On the Kenya side of the boundary the Masai wander with their scrawny cattle over their grassland steppe without being told how to dress, and new lodge and inn capital is welcome.

A short-term guest in Kenya would be out of his mind to predict the economic future of the country. But some of the dilemmas may be posed. Before Uhuru the British and South African settlers were making a success of agriculture in the so-called "White Highlands." They brought cattle dipping and good fertilizing practices, and applied business savvy to coffee and tea marketing. The British found the highlands almost deserted when they came in after building their railroad through man-eating lion country from Mombasa to Lake Victoria. Disease had been taking its toll of both the Kikuyu tribe and Kenya cattle, very much as it had wiped out the Indians in Massachusetts before the Pilgrims and Puritans moved in. So the British, thinking in terms of their own land laws, where possession is nine points of the law, considered the White Highlands their own. The Kikuyu, however, argued that tribal lands were owned in perpetuity without the formality of property deeds, even when they were not being occupied. They claimed that it was the British who were the squatters. Faced by the probability of eventual expropriation by the Uhuru

State, some two thousand out of the three thousand white European farmers sold their land for money that was provided by a British grant. The land, generally that of small farmers, was cut up into even smaller plots and parcelled out to twenty thousand Africans. The big question is whether a multitude of small, individual proprietors will be as efficient as Europeans on larger acreage who were conversant with mechanized farming techniques, scientific fertilizing, the cross-breeding of stock, and the prevention of disease.

But whatever the future of Kenya farm efficiency, it is doubtful that State-run farms will ever have much success in Africa. African tradition is tribal, and the tribe, though a social collectivity, isn't a State. I got a limited glimpse of this when, en route from Mount Kenya back to Nairobi, my Kikuyu driver remarked that his birthplace, in Mau Mau country, was some six miles off the main road near Nyeri. Since he hadn't see his wife and child for a week, I let him take me over some of the worst roads in the world to an African tavern, where he left me to go for his family. His wife, as it turned out, was in need of six hundred shillings to complete a deal for a house on family lands. The Kikuyus, so I gathered from a conversation that was sometimes in English for my benefit, have a definite property sense. The traditional difference between African and western property titles is that ownership of land in tropical Africa is vested with the father or the eldest member of the family or clan instead of with the individual. With the Kikuyu, who are now interested in property titles, this is changing somewhat. But the old sense of tribal and family loyalty remains; my driver told me that no one with a job could become really rich in Africa because of the jobless relatives that feel they have a call upon some of his income. And, by family custom, no son, grandson or close relative is deprived of access to a patch of family ground. This makes for an effective form of non-state social security. Land is now bought and sold in the open market, and put up for security when a loan is sought. But the concurrence of the family elder is traditionally needed for a sale, and the elder judges the claims of those who might still need the land for their support.

This is a pattern that makes for family and clan freedom, or what has been described as "tribal individualism." It is a pattern that is perfectly compatible with farm marketing cooperatives, or collective group ownership of such things as tractors. But the pattern would resist State expropriation of the land to the last. The idea of the Communists that the government should own the means of production would hardly go over with the Kikuyu tribe.

Even the Israeli-type kibbutz, where farm lands and property are vested in a producer-cooperative collectivity, would hardly go down with the Kikuyu or other Kenya tribes if the kibbutz itself did not happen to be a family or clan affair. Tom Mboya, the planning minister, says the Israeli-style producer-cooperative, where the farm is owned and worked communally, is more possible among his own Luo tribesmen than among the Kikuyu, but,

speaking for himself, he says "I doubt whether I could go so far in communal spirit as to enter a kibbutz for life." More Africans, he says, are "increasingly coming to want individual possessions, which they can dispose of at will."

Both Kenyatta and Tom Mboya think the tribe-as-social-security-unit can be preserved without menace to nation building. It is easy to believe this in Nairobi, where Kenyatta maintains some of the pomp of government that was associated with the British. Kenyatta, in a sense, has replaced the Queen as the symbol of unity. But when one travels around or flies over Kenya, the difficulties of making a nation out of diverse peoples in diverse climates become apparent. The British put Kenya together originally without regard to natural geographical divisions. The tropical coast, with its mixture of Arab and Portuguese flavor, is separated from the temperate highlands by a wide strip of rocky, tangled and semi-barren country that supports elephants but not much else. The Northern Frontier District is a desert which is open to the Somalis, a Hamitic people who are sometimes called the "Black Arabs." There are a half-million Somalis in Kenya, and they have been Islamized since the tenth century, which introduces a religious complication. To the West of Nairobi one drops over a magnificent escarpment into the great Rift Valley, which merges indistinguishably with a continuation of the Rift in Tanzania. Masai herdsmen wander across the Kenya-Tanzania border with no concern for political boundaries, following their cattle to whatever pastures are greenest, and living apart from more agricultural tribesmen on a diet of blood, milk and (so the stranger is told) cow's urine. The Masai, with their dangling ear ornaments, their cowdung plastered huts, and their nomadic ways, are, next to the Somalis, the most indigestible lump in the Kenya tribal mixture. But all of the fifty-odd Kenya tribes have their differences. They speak a hodge-podge of dialects, which makes Swahili (a semi-Arab lingua franca) or English a universal necessity if the tribes are to become a true nation. But universal education is not yet a reality in Kenya, and there are many in the land who cannot speak to each other. If Kenyatta were to die tomorrow, what would keep Kenya from flying apart, with Luo fighting Kikuyu, and with the Somalis of the North and the Giriama of the coast splitting off? Kenyatta's own Kikuyu tribe, which is the largest and most strategically situated in the country, took the leadership in organizing the revolt against British rule. The Kikuyu are universally respected (and feared) for their cleverness; historically, they were the "people on the edge of the forest," and they had to exercise cunning both to protect themselves against the Masai from the Rift Valley who raided their cattle, and against the lions and other ferocious beasts that inhabited the wooded slopes of Mount Kenya and the Aberdare chain. But Kenyatta has brought along no obvious Kikuyu successor. He has had to maneuver in the manner of a Chicago Democratic mayor to hold his heterogeneous nation together. His vice president, Daniel Arap Moi, is a Kalenjin tribesman. Tom Mboya, the planning minister, is, of course, a Luo. By playing down tribalism, Kenyatta hopes to create a situation in which the Kikuyu would gracefully accept a Daniel Arap Moi or a Mboya as President. Whether he is succeeding or not is a question which no short-term western visitor is in a position to

answer. The westerner can take comfort from the prospect that, even if tribalism should tear Kenya apart, the Communists wouldn't get much out of it. Tribes would resist Marxist centralization as much as any other kind.

Since Kenya lacks copper deposits, oil, gold and diamonds, it offers no great temptation to "imperialists" in search of the raw materials of industry. What it has is a temperate highland farming climate and wild animals. The Kenyatta government has moved carefully in agriculture, keeping a white South African, Bruce McKenzie, on as Minister of Agriculture, the only white man in the Uhuru cabinet. European wheat and cattle ranchers have been encouraged to stay and take out citizenship; it is the smaller farmers on the old Kikuyu land who have been prodded to sell out and leave. Coffee and other agricultural produce have moved traditionally through the Suez Canal to northern markets, and this movement has been cut off by the Israeli-Arab war. But during my stay in Kenya, which included a trip to Mombasa on the coast, there didn't seem to be much perturbation because of the closing of the Suez. The Israelis, who did some twenty million dollars worth of export business with Africa in 1966 and took more than twenty-five millions of imports in exchange, offer the transshipment facilities of their Red Sea-Gulf of Aqaba port of Elath to East African countries which wish to continue their trade to Europe via the eastern Mediterranean. The haul from Elath to the Mediterranean is a short one, and with improved unloading and loading something will be worked out.

Important though agriculture is to Kenya, the thing that impresses the visitor is the vision of the country's future as one of the great tourist attractions of the world. Ecologists are fearful that, with the doubling of the East African human population in the next thirty years, the great herds of zebras, wildebeests, buffalo, and gazelles of all types, along with the giraffes, the lions, the cheetahs, the leopards and the big-eared elephants, will have to give way to domestic cattle. But there are countering predictions that the controlled preservation of the game in many areas will produce a greater income than any other use to which the land might be put – and, incidentally, sell more cameras than guns. An automobile safari through the huge Tsavo reservations which lie between Mombasa on the coast and the Nairobi plateau is enough to make a visitor certain that cattle won't soon displace the elephants in this part of the world. The land is too jagged and rough for cattle.

The enemy of the elephants and other animals is the commercial poacher; according to Peter Hill Beard's studies in his fascinating "The End of the Game," some three hundred thousand head of game were slaughtered in 1961 by poachers. Compared to this, the ten thousand head taken by safari hunters and local resident hunters was negligible. But the poacher's day is not what it used to be. One of the heartening stories is of Mau Mau terrorists who, after turning State's evidence on the worst of the Mau Mau leaders, have reformed and become park rangers devoted to preserving the

animals as a great revenue-producing resource for their country. The poachers were driven out of the Tsavo even before Uhuru by dedicated white wardens who planned their eviction campaigns with military thoroughness. And the Uhuru government has accepted and expanded on the heritage of concern for game parks and game preservation. Tom Mboya speaks of developing a system of game cropping which would increase the protein diet of Kenyans without having to replace eland and hippo with domesticated cattle. Since domestic stock deteriorates in many places in East Africa (the climate and habitat are termed "ecologically brittle"), wild animal farming may be the response to the challenge which faces an ever-increasing East African population. Game cropping, as practised in Matabeleland, has already proved that it can produce more meat to the acre than cattle can produce, and with less damage to the soil; moreover, the wild game does better than cattle in times of drought. And the selective culling out of the older animals actually increases the calving, which, in Kenya, would leave more animals to be photographed. But this is the hopeful side of things; you can find plenty of pessimists predicting "the last safari."

Aside from the tourist lure of the game parks, Kenya also has its marvelous Indian Ocean Riviera. Enterprising German travel agencies in Frankfurt, so one is told, have already booked all the hotel space on the Indian Ocean front for the "season" over the next two years. Luckily, the Indian Ocean can hardly become extinct.

Generalizations about next year — or next month — in Africa are notoriously dangerous (who could have predicted, for example, the civil war in Nigeria, which was supposedly a model Uhuru country?). But, for what it is worth, one can sit at the New Stanley Thorn Tree Cafe in Nairobi and watch blacks, European whites and turbaned Asians mingling with a feeling that the atmosphere is one of genuine relaxation. One gets the impression in Nairobi (again for what it is worth, which conceivably could be nothing) that there are destined to be three Africas, not one, at least for the next period in history. Arab North Africa is far away, separated from Kenya by the deserts of the Sudan; and there will be no real love between Nairobi and Soviet-dominated Cairo as long as the Moslem Somalis get Communist arms. Verbally, the Kenyans are the utter enemies of white-ruled South Africa and Rhodesia, the "incandescent tip" of the continent. But, in practice, the Kenya government doesn't seem particularly blood-thirsty when it comes to pushing against apartheid hundreds of miles to the South.

The visit of Dr. Hastings Banda, the President of Malawi, to Nairobi last September could be significant. As an old Revolutionary comrade-in-arms of Jomo Kenyatta, Dr. Banda had been invited to deliver the opening speech at Nairobi's annual agricultural show. Subsequent to the invitation, but prior to his arrival in Kenya, Dr. Banda made a trade deal with South Africa. His reason was prudential: Malawi is a little,

land-locked country in close proximity to "white" Rhodesia, the Portuguese colony of Mozambique, and South Africa itself. Dr. Banda had simply decided that bread was more important than ideology at this point in Malawi's evolution. He was willing to live in amity with a next-door apartheid nation as long as there was no compulsion on him to foster apartheid at home.

When the left-wing Kenya People's Union announced plans to picket Dr. Banda on his arrival in Nairobi, Kenyatta waved his fly whisk and uttered an authoritative "no." And there was no picketing, no boycotting, not even so much as a peep of displeasure in Dr. Banda's presence.

The symbolism involved in the peaceful visit of Dr. Banda to Kenya was not appreciated in Tanzania, where they still train guerillas with Red Chinese aid to infiltrate into Portuguese Mozambique and into Rhodesia. But the Tanzanian government did nothing to protest Kenya's welcome to Dr. Banda. To the contrary, it has just recently joined with Kenya and Uganda in a three-way East African customs union.

Peace, it could be wonderful – if it only lasts!



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